

Kings and Prophets 16-08-25a

This is Thursday, the 25th of August, 2016. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets tonight. We are going to be transitioning, sort of doing a pivot through Jeremiah, back into the history of the southern kingdom of Judah, and moving into the days of the captivity.

We will be in two chapters tonight. The first one will be 2 Kings chapter 23. This will review and catch us up a little bit from what we studied several weeks back in 2 Chronicles 34 and 35.

It provides us information that was not in that chapter, and is very helpful for the other chapter we're going to be looking at tonight in the second brief session, which is from Jeremiah. So let's take a moment to sort of dress right and cover in our minds and ensure that God the Holy Spirit is present and active, and then we'll begin. Father, we thank You for another opportunity to spend this time together, being nourished and strengthened and encouraged from Your Word, seeing these wonderful truths that are contained in seemingly some of the most unlikely places.

We often look to parts of Your Word that are very much on the surface in the Psalms or in the teachings of the Lord Jesus to find our comfort and our encouragement, and yet we find that You have given us such wonderful things to consider and to reflect upon in the narrative portions and in the prophetic portions that we are looking at, such as those tonight. We ask Your blessing on us as we examine these and try to understand them for the purpose of making application, living our lives more fully in the light of Your plan and purpose, and preparing ourselves for future service and function, bearing fruit and reflecting the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name.

Amen. 2 Kings 23. You know that Jeremiah the prophet ministers during the days of King Josiah and down into the days of his son Jehoiakim.

We saw this time bracket given to us in the very first lines of Jeremiah. He is the son of Hilkiah of the priests who are at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. And the word of the Lord comes to him in the days of Josiah the son of Ammon king of Judah in the 13th year of his reign and in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah until the end of the 11th year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, the carrying away into Babylon.

So that's where we are and we're going to sort of comprehend most of that in the next few minutes. So get a good grip and hang on. Back in 2 Kings 23, Josiah, as you will recall from our reading of the parallel passage in Chronicles, is a man whose heart is for the Lord.

There's been no king like him really since David. So he went up in verse 2 to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets and all the people both small and great. He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.

Now just by way of review, you remember he wanted to refurbish the temple and the book of the law was found. You remember who found it? Who gets credit for finding the scroll? Hilkiah, the high priest. Now this has been often cited as sort of a subterfuge by which they wrote up the book of the law and presented and said, look what we found and it had never been there before.

This of course is complete rubbish. But what is far more likely and what is interesting from a canonicity point of view is that it was a common practice and has been all the way down to the present day at the building of a monument or an edifice or an important symbolic structure to ensconce something within it. We have time capsules buried all over the country that people have gotten together and said this is our centennial, somebody can dig this up and open it at the bicentennial or the tricentennial.

And what is possible, and I'll just leave it at that, what is possible is that 350 years earlier when Solomon built the temple, he had a pristine copy of the law of Moses placed into the cornerstone of his temple. You can only imagine after all of the exhortations of King David and all of the work that went into that thing, the design, the prayers, God speaking at first hand to Solomon and everything else and his request for wisdom, that the word of God would become a part of that temple. It just really kind of stands to reason that it would.

And at this time, three and a half to four centuries later, where the building has fallen into such disrepair, it's been modified, they've knocked out doorways, they've widened things so that they could bring in all kinds of idols and altars and they've really made a mess of what had been the glorious building in the days of Solomon. And at some point when they are trying to put this thing right, and sometimes you've got to tear out to put back in, I know a guy that has been doing that for the last 30 years, living up in Oklahoma now, and sometimes you've got to tear out a wall so that you can rebuild the wall and do it right. It's just come apart.

Well, as they're doing this and maybe pulling away some of the facing stones so that they can re-adhere them and put fresh ones in or whatever, they find this book of the law. Hilkiah is there supervising the work, whether it was a low-level workman who says, there looks like there's something in here, it's a box, it's a scroll, whatever. Hilkiah comes and removes it out of there and takes it to King Josiah.

So King Josiah is now reading from this, but think about it. Wouldn't it be great after all of the decline and the corruption and the confusion and the active persecution such as in the days of Athaliah, for those who love the word of God, who wanted to stamp it out, wipe it out, that surviving within the wall all this time is a 350-year-old pristine copy of the law of Moses, untouched, unbothered, really nobody might have even remembered that it was there, and here it has come back out of God's temple at such a time as this. This is the beginning when it was emplaced in the wall, and now we are within a few years of the end and the destruction of this temple.

So it goes in at the beginning and it comes out at the end, and it is the word of God that lives

and abides forever, that emerges. This is what Josiah is reading in verse 2. All the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. The king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before God.

Why is he standing by a pillar? Do you know anything at all about pillars related to the temple? How many of them are there? Two great pillars, remember that? Solomon gives them names, remember what they are? Boaz, can you imagine David's great-grandfather, Boaz? Remember there's Boaz, Salmon, and then Obed, and then Jesse, and then David, and then Solomon. One of these pillars is named Boaz, and the other is Yashin. It says Jachin, I think, in your King James, but it's Boaz.

He's standing by one of these pillars, doesn't tell us which one. Maybe he's standing between them, but he's standing by a pillar. He made a covenant before the Lord to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart, all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in the book.

All the people took a stand for the covenant. Now, we're within 20 years of the decline and fall of the Southern Kingdom. Edward Gibbon never did write that book.

He wrote the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, but he could have written the decline and fall of the Southern Kingdom. But the king commanded Hilkiah, the high priest, who was the one who found the thing. By the way, what do we know about Jeremiah and his family, his antecedents? Who is Jeremiah the son of? Hilkiah.

This is Jeremiah's daddy standing here. The priests of the second order. Now, notice, pay close attention here.

The king commanded Hilkiah, the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers. Now, why is he talking to the priests of the second order? Why isn't he talking to the priests of the first order? Who's been running this corrupt charnel house all this time in the days of evil and debauchery and grotesque corruption? Those guys are out. It's the priests of the second order that he brings in.

That's one way to understand it. But especially note, and just note for now, that he also calls the doorkeepers. There are three doorkeepers for the three entrances to the temple.

Or at least there's the great door and then two smaller doors. But we know from other scripture there's three of these doorkeepers. They take out all the articles that are made for Baal, Asherah, for all the hosts of heaven.

He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel. Where is Bethel? Formerly known as Luz. Who renamed it Bethel? Jacob.

Remember Jacob's ladder, and if I return to this place, and so on. But is Bethel in Judah? Or Benjamin? Where's Bethel? It's up north. We tend to kind of forget all these biblical names, and

they look real familiar.

And you think, wait a minute. He's the king of the southern kingdom. Northern kingdom's gone, right? It's out.

But remember the expansion, this brief expansion, and people think we're returning to our glory days. And there's the vacuum of the Assyrians who have been weakened because they're being attacked from behind by the Babylonians. And so in the days of Josiah and his father, they've expanded back out.

And they have a lot of old Israel. And for a brief time, the southern kingdom has control over vast portions of the northern kingdom. Because of this, it's like the sea that goes out right before a tsunami.

And so they've expanded into that vacuum. That's why he is able to do things up in Bethel with no opposition. And that's important for where we're going here.

And so he took the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places. This, I think, are the priests of the first order, if you're asking me. To burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah, the places all around Jerusalem.

Those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the hosts of heaven. This is naturalism. This is, you know, we're one with the universe and so on.

Materialism. We are governed by these celestial physical bodies. The analog to that now is secular humanist materialism.

I got to listen to the robot voice of old Stephen Hawking explaining how we don't have free will. It's all predetermined. You know, the scattering that happened at the Big Bang is why every single thing you've ever done was foreordained.

You couldn't have done anything any different because it's all just a result of the big bang. You know, the pool table and somebody smacked the cue ball. We don't know who, but it hit and there's no way it could have happened any other way.

They believe this. And these lame, fallacious, by the way, experiments that say, oh, there was a blip on the electroencephalogram before you made your decision to hit the button. Therefore, it was determined by materialistic electrical impulses before you were consciously aware.

It's all rubbish. Anyway, these are those guys in that day. Same guys.

And Josiah collects them all, throws them out on their ear, brought out the wooden image in verse 6. That's the Asherah. This is the, you know, well, we're missing the feminine element. You know, you've got God and he's male and you've got all this patriarchal.

So, you know, this is women's lib in those days. And so they wanted to have a goddess.

Everybody else has got a goddess.

We don't have a goddess. We've only got a God. And everything is so patriarchal and so unfair.

And so they made this wooden chick and put her in the temple. And she's Asherah. And she's the consort of Baal and people who amalgamated Baal with God.

You know, Baal means Lord. So, well, he's the Lord, right? Baal, Lord. Anyway, Josiah drags her out from the house of the Lord to the Brook Kedron outside Jerusalem.

Burned that thing at the Brook Kedron and ground it to ashes and threw the ashes on the graves of the common people. This is really funny. Why did he do this? Took Asherah, burnt her to ashes, and he didn't just leave the ashes there.

He took the ashes and scattered them all over the graves of the common people. Why? They say there's no concept of resurrection in the Old Testament. What is Josiah saying here? All you people trusting in Asherah? Well, she's dead.

Let her raise herself and then raise you. Here's her ashes. Go for it.

See if her ashes can raise you out of your graves. He didn't put them in the brook and let them go away. You know, Moses mixed the dust of the golden calf and made all the people drink it.

Why does he scatter it on the graves? This is Josiah's commentary that there's only one God of life who can raise the dead. That Job said he will see on the last day, even if the skin worms eat his flesh. I know my Redeemer lives and I will see Him.

Josiah knows this. And he says, all you people with your trust in Asherah? It's only in this life. And here's her ashes.

She's dead. You're dead. You're all going to stay dead if you're depending on her to raise you.

Then, verse 7, he tore down the booths and the perverted person. These are your gay people. These are your homosexual, cultic, prostitute, just horribly awful things going on in the name of worship and in the name of cult practice.

This was all of the stuff that God sent Israel into the land of Canaan to destroy, to eliminate, to purge, to make vanish. And it has not only not vanished, but it has penetrated into the kingdom of Judah and into the very temple of God itself. And God is not in favor of that, as you might guess.

So, Josiah drags all that stuff out, tears it down. Notice it says they were in the house of the Lord where the women wove hangings for the wooden image. Of course, the woman can't dress herself, the wooden Asherah.

So, there's women sitting around making clothes that they drape over this wooden image. And

they change them because, of course, she's helpless. You know, if you can't even change your own clothes, how good are you at helping somebody out of their problem? But they didn't figure this out.

Verse 8. He brought all the priests from the cities of Judah and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense from Geba to Beersheba, broke down the high places at the gates which were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua, the governor of the city, which were to the left of the city gate. Notice the governor of the city is a big fan of this. This is right next to his house.

He's got the most wonderful, gorgeous, well-appointed idolatry site right there on his property, right to the left of the city gate. Nevertheless, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren. He defiled Topheth in the valley of Hinnom, so that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.

He eliminated this so that people could no longer look at this. It's in Jerusalem that they're passing children through the fire to Molech. And so he desecrated all of that, tore it apart, poured something defiling all over it.

You can guess what that might be. Then he removed the horses that the king of Judah had dedicated to the sun at the entrance to the house of the Lord. These are big equine statues, probably wood overlaid with gold or something, that were at the entrance to the house of the Lord by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court, and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

Notice this is horse-drawn chariots. They're worshiping the sun and the moon, and you know how they talk about the sun is like a chariot being drawn by a horse that goes across the sky. Well, they had a literal representation of this.

This is more materialistic, naturalistic worship overlaid, amalgamated with, corrupting the worship of God. This stuff is right. You have to walk through these to get to the house of God.

So he takes them all apart, and obviously they were wood overlaid because he busts them up and burns them. The altars that were on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz. Remember the dial of Ahaz, the steps of Ahaz? Well, those steps went up to this roof, and there's all of these idolatrous altars that you climb those steps to get to.

The kings of Judah had made them, the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Remember there was the outer court of the women and all that, and then the inner court? Well, there's this stuff all over the place. Josiah drags all that out.

Then the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, which were on the south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built. This goes all the way back. You know, Solomon built the house of the Lord.

Then he turned right around and built the Mount of Corruption for his many wives and put their altars and their places of worship for their cultic practices. You know, the same guy built this, the abomination of the Sidonians, Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. So he's got the Sidonians, this is Tyre and Sidon up north.

Then you've got Moab and Ammon that God had said to the 10th generation, you know, keep all that stuff out of here. All of that had been brought in by Solomon. So this corruption goes all the way back to the beginning.

Broken pieces, the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images, filled their places with bones of men. This is how you desecrate something, you defile it with death. And the altar that was at Bethel, the high place.

Now pay attention here, verse 15. The altar that was at Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made. Both that altar and the high place he broke down.

Do you remember this? Keep your finger here and turn back real quick to 1 Kings chapter 13. We studied this almost exactly two years ago. 1 Kings chapter 13.

Remember the message of the man of God? He goes from Judah to Bethel. This is 1 Kings 13.1. Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And the prophet cries out against Jeroboam's altar.

He says, O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David. On you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the Lord has spoken.

Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes shall be poured out. So it came to pass, King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God. He stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, Arrest him.

Then his hand which he stretched out toward him withered, so that he could not pull it back. The altar was split apart, the ashes poured out, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. So the king answered and entreated.

Remember he got healed. And then this is the same man of God that was told to go back and not to talk to anybody and not to stop. And the other man of God stops him and waylays him.

And he ends up, as you read the rest of this chapter, he ends up being torn in verse 25, I think, 24. After he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, he saddled a donkey, prophet whom he had brought back. He had gone, a lion met him on the road, in verse 24, and killed him.

His corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. And the lion stood by the corpse. There is a donkey and a lion standing by the corpse.

And you remember the rest of that. The man of God buries him and then says, Bury me there. Well, go back now to 2 Kings 23, Josiah verse 16.

After he has done all this and he burns these bones on the altar, according to that prophecy, he apparently doesn't even remember this prophecy, because somebody is going to remind him of it here shortly. But he does all of this. He broke it down, he burned the high place, crushed it to powder and burned the wooden image.

As Josiah turned, somebody in Illinois is calling me for some reason. Don't you just love cell phones? So he turns in verse 16 of 2 Kings 23. Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that were there on the mountain.

And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altars, and defiled it according to the word of the Lord, which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. You know, if you look in a lot of the valleys around Jerusalem right now that used to be verdant, the sides of the Mount of Olives and the slopes on each side of the Kedron Valley, they're covered in graves. People have got this superstition that that's a good place to be buried.

Well, these people thought the same thing. But they're around Jeroboam's altar. I mean, you can at least credit people who think, well, being close to the Temple Mount, that would be a good thing when Messiah comes.

These people are buried all around Jeroboam's altar at Bethel, and it's just all spooky superstitions. So he takes all those bones out and says, yeah, you want to be resurrected? Here, you're resurrected. I'm going to dig you all up and burn you with fire.

But then verse 17, he said, what gravestone is this that I see? There was an unusual-looking one. And the men of the city told him, it is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel. He said, let him alone, let no one move his bones.

So they let his bones alone with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. Josiah took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria. Notice how his power has extended back out in this vacuum.

Happy days are here again. We're reversing off even the mistakes that Solomon made. This guy is the second David.

There was the first coming of David. This guy is like the second coming of David. He takes care of all these high places in Samaria that Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger.

He did to them according to the deeds he had done at Bethel, executed the priests of the high places, and burned men's bones on them and returned to Jerusalem. The king commanded all the people, verse 21, saying, Keep the Passover to the Lord your God as it is written. And you remember we saw this in Chronicles.

This is a Passover like nobody has seen since the days of Samuel. Since they first came into the land, nobody ever kept a Passover this way. And verse 25 says, Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his might, according to all the law of Moses, nor after him did any arise like him.

Nevertheless, verse 26, The Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, with which his anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations which Manasseh had provoked him with. The Lord said, I will remove Judah from my sight as I have removed Israel. I will cast off this city, Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the house of which I said my name shall be there.

Notice, interestingly, when that house finally gets knocked down, what has been there for 350 years that's not going to be there when it gets knocked down? What has been removed from the house, even in the law? God's law isn't going to perish with Solomon's temple. It is as though its presence in the temple, it has survived all of this defilement, all of this corruption, everything else, but Josiah has removed that, he's read it, he's made a covenant in its light, and he's done all of this great rehab and restoration, but it doesn't say, and behold, they put the scroll of the book back into the wall. And the house of God, with all of this wonderful activity, isn't there.

And when Nebuchadnezzar comes and knocks that thing down, God's word is going to survive where the temple does not. It's just kind of a little interesting side note. Now the rest of the Acts of Josiah, are they not written in the book of the Chronicles? What do we know from the book of Chronicles? What happens in his 18th year? Pharaoh, from Egypt, comes up because the Assyrians have had to vacate their capital because Babylon has attacked them and driven them out of their capital.

The government, and pay attention to this detail, it's going to come up in our second session. The government, what used to be the capital of Assyria? Nineveh, remember where Jonah went? Nineveh, they can't operate in Nineveh. That's already been sacked and taken over by the Babylonians.

So where is the government of Assyria now? And Pharaoh is trying to march up there and help them against Babylon. And Josiah goes and interferes. And all this happens in the Valley of Megiddo.

But where is the government in exile for Assyria? They're in the town of Haran. Haran. Where does the town of Haran come from? Go all the way back to Genesis 12.

Abraham, get thee up, remember the Chaldees, go to the land I will show you, and so on. Who is Abraham's father? Terah, right? He's got two living sons. He had three sons, but one died.

He's got Abraham. He's got Nahor. And he had another son named Haran.

And so they're all marching together down to the land that God will show Abraham. But they short stop. And Terah doesn't go any further.

And Abraham stays there until Terah dies. And there is a city there. And that's the founding of Haran.

Terah names it for his dead son. And he stops and builds a city. Hold that thought.

We're going to pause here and take our break. We'll be back. And we'll be finishing up this short story and looking at Jeremiah right afterward.